Collective action on Oceans, Climate and Biodiversity

This document is submitted to the 18th Plenary for information

1 INTRODUCTION

Ocean and atmosphere are two critical components to understand and predict climate change. Ocean is also important for biodiversity, as major species loss takes place in oceans and seas. Transformational change is necessary to address biodiversity loss and climate change at once, which requires action across all levels from individuals to national governments.

The importance of observation of ocean and coastal zones, and the need to strengthen observation and science to offer solutions and stimulate effective climate and biodiversity action have been broadly recognized.

While it is deemed essential to put ocean science at the heart of global considerations, more than 80% of the ocean has never been mapped or explored. Ocean observations are currently underfunded: only a small portion of in situ ocean observations have sustained funding, and there are limited mechanisms available to access medium- to long-term funding.

Despite the evidence of a key nexus area, there is still a clear disconnect between the ocean, climate, and biodiversity communities. Increased cooperation is needed to address the interrelated challenges of climate change and biodiversity in the oceans through sustained ocean observations.

2 UN DECADE FOR OCEAN SCIENCE

The UN Decade of Ocean Science (2021-2030) was launched in January 2021 to build a step-change in the way knowledge is used and generated. It is centered on building the science-policy interface to help countries achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially on ocean health, as well as providing sound science needed to inform global climate policy frameworks. The focus is on the relevance of partnerships, the development and bridging of knowledge systems, and a user-friendly science-policy interface. It is an action framework of the decade with 10 key challenges.

At the 17th GEO Plenary, the role of the GEO community regarding the 10 challenges of the UN Decade for Ocean Science was discussed. Key actions for GEO include providing access to data to monitor current status and long-term risks, and develop adaptive capacities, focusing on the different scales of application and adaptation.

3 OCEANS UNDER THE UNFCCC

Although the ocean is part of the climate system and is a driver of the climate system, it has been largely ignored in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) policy process until recently.

Efforts are ongoing to strengthen ocean action across the board within the UNFCCC. The outcome of the 26th Conference of the Parties (COP26), the Glasgow Climate Pact, recognized the importance of ensuring the integrity of all ecosystems, including the ocean, and invited UNFCCC workstreams and constituted bodies to integrate the ocean under their work. Furthermore, at COP26, the Parties requested an annual dialogue, starting in June 2022, to strengthen ocean-based action. Additionally, Parties invited the relevant work programmes and constituted bodies under the UNFCCC to consider how to integrate and strengthen ocean-based action in their existing mandates and work plans.

With the further recognition of the Ocean and Climate dialogue at COP26, there was the ask for national governments to start collaborating across departments and develop a strong scientific basis.

Notably, the concept of ocean-climate nexus can help identify opportunities for including ocean solutions in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the Paris Agreement. Also, it would be possible to address biodiversity concerns by aligning NDCs with goals and targets from other international agreements such as the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework (under negotiation) and The Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance to enhance ambition on mitigation and adaptation for coastal and marine Nature-based Solutions actions.

Parties have the opportunity at the upcoming COP27 in November 2022 to come together and agree on pathways to further strengthen ocean-climate action under the UNFCCC, as well as call for national level action on the ocean-climate nexus.

4 OCEAN UNDER THE UN CBD

The UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) does not differentiate between land and the ocean in terms of biodiversity. A new Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework is being negotiated under the CBD. This framework will define targets and pathways for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity for the next decade and beyond.

The focus on an inclusive approach resulted in ocean-related issues being overlooked within the negotiations for the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, including in relation to its goals and targets. The provisions of the draft framework currently include the ocean only implicitly, which represents a risk that ocean-specific issues are left behind. Nevertheless, there are a number of potential entry points where ocean issues could be strengthened across the proposed targets, including around 'Spatial Planning', 'Ecosystem Restoration', 'Conservation', 'Wild Species', 'Climate Change', as well as 'Harmful incentives', and 'Financial resources'.

At the upcoming COP15 in December 2022, the Parties still have an opportunity to address the ocean-climate-biodiversity nexus when finalising the negotiations on this milestone agreement in global environmental governance.

5 DISCUSSION POINTS

Cooperation mechanisms between the UNFCCC and the CBD remain insufficient. There is still no common vision or long-term strategy between the climate and biodiversity regimes despite having a common origin as the Rio Conventions. Recently, some windows of opportunities have opened to emphasise the role of nature and ocean across the UNFCCC and CBD, also in view of the relevant work under the UN Decade of Ocean Science.

The link between climate and biodiversity communities on a policy level could be strengthened to heighten the mandate of ocean-related issues, as well as the critical component of Earth observation data for better understanding and link to climate and biodiversity action.

Greater consideration of marine issues could also be sought at the level of the practical implementation, through the monitoring framework, where common indicators and targets would reconcile different reporting exercises under the UNFCCC and CBD. This would improve synergies among the global agendas and help avoid duplication of efforts by governments. The GEO community is able to provide ocean data for integrated climate and biodiversity action to effectively support the reporting and decision-making process.

Financial resources for ocean-climate-biodiversity observations should also be discussed, as the success of any monitoring framework will largely depend on funding.

The 18th GEO Plenary session on "Collective Action on Oceans, Climate and Biodiversity" aims to demonstrate how an integrated approach to Earth observations for oceans, climate and biodiversity can achieve impact.

GEO Blue Planet will demonstrate how it is coordinating the development of tools and operational services that meet users and GEO members' needs. In addition, a panel discussion will focus on engagement with governments in order to better support the alignment with the UNFCCC, UN CBD, the UN Decade for Ocean Science and other relevant processes. The experts will consider a coherent messaging for climate and biodiversity from the ocean observation community.

6 KEY REFERENCES

UNFCCC Ocean and Climate Dialogue: Ocean and Climate Change Dialogue 2022 | UNFCCC

Options for strengthening action on the ocean and coasts under the UNFCCC – October 2022: UNFCCC-Ocean-Climate-Options_October-2022.pdf (squarespace.com)

UN Decade of Ocean Science: The Ocean Decade - The Science we need for the Ocean we want

Copernicus Sustainability Survey: Sustainabilitysurveyupdatedreportfinal.pdf (copernicus.eu)

Integrating further the ocean-climate-biodiversity nexus into the Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework: Ocean-Climate-Platform_Policy-brief_CBD_Post-2020-GBF.pdf

National Geographic / Ocean: Ocean | National Geographic Society